

PUBLIC COMMENT ON DRAFT WMA PUBLIC USE RULES

The public comment period ran from December 10, 2018 to January 18, 2019 and we received 8 comments.

Survey Monkey Comments (7).....1

Email/Letter Comments (1).....2

1 Adam Jimmerson Billings MT The rule changes look fine to me. I'm thankful for these areas that allow my family and I to enjoy the outdoors.

2 Kyle Billings MT I would be all for having designated camping areas in WMA.

3 James Simpach Kalispell MT This is just a comment on the Ray Kuhn's WMA regulations. I've been told that it was a weapon restricted area, but this is unclear in the regulations. I've hunted in there multiple times and every hunter was using a rifle. Perhaps the individual at the Kalispell FWP office was incorrect when saying it was a weapons restricted area. Thanks

4 Cottonwood Environmental Law Center Bozeman MT The rules should be amended to end livestock grazing on Wildlife Management Areas to reintroduce bison and/or allow elk to graze without competition for public resources.

5 Jason Van Hyning Florence MT I fully support the WMA Rules as proposed, especially those that continue to restrict any kind of off-road/trail motorized use.

6 Morgan Valliant Missoula MT I am the Conservation Lands Manager for the City of Missoula. We would like to propose a weapons restriction change for Mt Jumbo WMA to archery only. Hunting rules and regulations have long been a point of confusion for the public in the Mount Jumbo area because of the mix of landownership and different regulations. "Mt Jumbo" as the larger area is referred to, is a cornerstone of Missoula's open space system, and includes over 1800 acres of city, FWP, and FS lands. A driving factor for the purchase of the majority of Mt Jumbo by the City of Missoula and FWP was to protect important elk winter range and travel corridors. Mt Jumbo WMA is managed cooperatively with Missoula City and the Forest Service under guidance from the "The Mount Jumbo Management Plan," a document produced in 1999 by a Stewardship Subcommittee appointed by the City's Open Space Advisory Committee. The purpose of this document was to "ensure preservation of the mountain's natural resources and to provide for compatible recreation." As such, Mt Jumbo public lands have winter closures in place to protect wintering elk. The Management Plan recognizes the importance of recreational hunting as an outdoor activity and wildlife management tool. However, the document references the restrictions to hunting within city limits, which includes most of the lands within the Mount Jumbo public land boundary. Most of the land around Mt Jumbo WMA is either within the city limits with no allowable hunting or part of the South Zone of the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area which is managed as archery only. The majority of recreationists that use the Mt Jumbo WMA are accessing it through city lands or the South Zone of the NRA. The WMA is a small area (118 acres) within this matrix and includes trail systems that connect and weave in and out of these neighboring properties. This entire Mt Jumbo area is heavily used by hikers, dog walkers, runners, mountain bikers, and other non-hunters through the hunting season. Changing Mt Jumbo WMA to an archery only area would make the area safer for all recreationists and bring consistency with neighboring land regulations.

7 michael theis billing MT why on state lands, where hunters have to walk in only, ranchers are allowed to drive in, put up water tanks, salt blocks for there cows. how much longer will rancher run&control fish&wildlive? would like a answer

Email Comment:

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Hello FWP. I just tried to submit my comments about the 2019-20 Biennial WMA Public Use Rules, and my computer said it was before 5PM. But when I submitted them it told me the survey is closed. Below I have my comments. I hope they are considered with the full weight of all the other comments despite this technical error.

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Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks:

Thank for you the opportunity to comment on the 2019-20 Biennial WMA Public Use Rules. I live in York, and my family and I consider the greater Big Belts, including the Beartooth WMA, our home ground. I wanted to make several comments about the proposed changes in the Beartooth, as well as comments about the general management rules there.

FWP notes that the new camping restrictions in the Beartooth are "intended to help manage camping activities, reduce user conflicts for some portions of the WMA, and minimize resource impacts/habitat disturbances." I'm most concerned with the last point, reducing resource impact and habitat disturbances, and I generally support any efforts to that aim. But I must point out the incongruence of FWP's policies in the Beartooth.

Consider these impacts:

- In recent years, every May 15th, there's the annual spectacle of shed hunting as soon as the WMA reopens. Concentrating that many people on the landscape impacts the habitat, and for a growing minority of people who sell the antlers it amounts to quasi-commercialization of wildlife.
- Motorized use is allowed on the WMA. There is decades of research demonstrating the impact that road use has on landscapes.
- There is group lodging available to FWP at the old ranch headquarters. I stayed there two years ago as part of the Helena Master Naturalist class. It was a terrific experience. But again, motorized travel for almost 2 dozen people into that part of the WMA leaves an impact.

Those impacts are all sanctioned by FWP, yet when I spring bear hunt north of Moors and Candle Mountains, and I follow bear sign north past Willow Creek and over the ridge towards Elkhorn Creek, I'm not allowed to backpack camp wherever the hunting dictates. I must drop fully into Elkhorn Creek and camp in the designated camp spot. This is not at all to say that the regulations should cater to my particular activity, but to point out what kind of behavior your rules are encouraging. We can't backpack camp or hunt, or cross-country ski in the winter (due to the winter closure), yet FWP can host group events, I can drive my truck through the heart of the WMA, and scores of people can take antlers from the landscape.

I believe FWP should continually strive to instill a Leopold-style land ethic in the public. Closing all roads, banning shed hunting, abandoning the group facilities, allowing backpack camping and hunting, and allowing winter human-powered exploration would be far more inline with that land ethic than the currently proposed rules.

Respectfully,
Joe Donohoe"